

The Church at the Lord's Supper

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[0 : 00] So, if we could turn then to Paul's letter here in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, and we'll be looking at these verses 17 to 34. If you have a Bible, it will be quite helpful near you because I'll be referring a lot to the text.

And Paul wrote this letter to this group of believers around AD 54, a long time ago.

And you know, the church, if one said, what age is this church? The answer would be about 20, 20 years of age. In other words, very, very soon, following the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ, this church was despising the Lord's Supper, abusing the Lord's Supper, and humiliating people in the congregation, and had changed the Lord's Supper into a fiasco and a travesty of what it should have been. Calvin, the great French reformer, said this, it is wonderful and well nigh portentous that Satan could have accomplished so much in so short a time.

This is actually quite a difficult passage I would have thought to preach on. Indeed, I feel as if we're coming down from the heights that we heard about this morning and the gold and the frankincense and incense to some other dimension. Now, contrary to what one may think in a superficial reading of this chapter, Paul is not seeking to discourage anyone from coming to the Lord's Table. And his purpose is not to create fear and anxiety at the Lord's Table, neither is it about a question like, am I worthy to take communion? Rather, it is about engaging with the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.

Having said that, is it possible when we gather together for public worship, that we conduct ourselves in such a way as to incur guilt and even judgment?

[3 : 10] Is it possible when we gather for communion to remember the Lord's death that we can act in an unworthy manner? Is it conceivable that when we come together as church, it might be for the worse and not for the better?

Might our public worship meetings also be a place of sifting for those who are genuine and those who are not?

All of these questions that I've just shared with you are addressed in this passage. Brace yourself for some startling truths that Paul delivers to the Corinthian church here.

The central problem, as I've said, was the abuse of the Lord's Supper so soon after Christ had risen and been exalted to the right hand of God.

How should we behave at the Lord's Supper so as not to incur guilt and judgment? How important is it to have a proper understanding of what's going on in the Lord's Supper?

[4 : 33] The secularization of the Lord's Supper.

Regarding the origin of the Lord's Supper and self-examination as critical to a spiritual partaking of the Lord's Supper.

But I want to just say something. I've been in the Free Church since 1987. I've been a Christian since 1972.

I was in a Reformed Baptist for 15 years before I came into the Free Church. We had communion in the Reformed Baptist Church every single week. And I'm very, very glad of that.

Because I believe it keeps one near the cross and near Jesus Christ. You know, Paul had begun this letter by saying, Now I commend you in verse 2.

[6 : 00] And now he gets to 17 and says, I do not commend you. There's maybe a lesson there for pastors and ministers. Commend the congregation as much as you can.

And if it's not commending them as little as you need to. Paul says, I do not commend you because when you come together, it's not for the better, but for the worse.

Isn't that absolutely amazing? Because, look, coming together should be for the better every single time the people of God come together.

It's an honor. It's a privilege. It's where we're fed. It's where we're resourced. It's where we meet alongside our fellow believers.

And yet, Paul says, This is his opening salvo, if you like, And it gets worse. When you come together, It's not for the better, But for the worse.

[7 : 16] For in the first place, When you come together as church, You can see here he's talking about The church of God. The people of God. The public worship.

As we gather together. This is what he's concerned about. I hear he said that there are divisions among you, And I believe it in part.

Now, certainly, right at the beginning of this letter, You'll remember there were those party divisions, Popular preacher divisions, if you like.

I am of Paul. I am of Apollos. I am of Cephas. But it's difficult to know. You know something? We can't be certain every time we're reading some scriptures Of exactly what the situation was.

Especially when the writer doesn't develop it or unfold it. And I'm not absolutely sure. But I have a feeling That he's thinking more of the divisions That he wants to talk about Rather than, at this point, Rather than the earlier divisions.

[8 : 30] The division Where rich people You could call it social snobbery Are not waiting for the poorer people to come.

And that these rich people Are guzzling away all the food And showing that division. Because the other thing that I think It's important to understand When we're going through this passage Is this.

The Lord's Supper In the New Testament church Was embedded within a meal. This business of We bits of bread And little individual The Lord's Supper Took part in the context of a meal.

And you can even see that If you read this chapter carefully It talks about when you eat And all this sort of stuff Often. And you know that he says, Paul In this part That there are factions among you In order that those There must be factions among you.

I was quite surprised when I saw that. I thought, that's really strange, isn't it? On the one hand It's the curse of the church Throughout history That there's been all those divisions. A denial of the beautiful words of Jesus In John 17 That we might be one.

[10 : 02] And that the world might see That we are one Truly one Together as the people of God The redeemed of the Lord. But yet Paul, of course Paul's theology Knows that God is not taken by surprise In anything that happens Either in the church Or in an individual's life.

And he actually says there He uses a very strong word That's translated in our English As must. There must be factions among you In order that those Who are genuine among you May be recognized.

Well, I suppose you can understand it If there are people Within the church That are beginning to Spread False teaching Or are beginning to behave In a manner that is not Becoming As a Christian Then That cannot be ignored And therefore That will create A division And it may well even Manifest Who is genuine And who is not The culture In Paul's day That he was Sending this letter into Was a culture Where people like to Flaunt Their social superiority And like to Flaunt it in a way That humiliated Those who were lower

In the social ladder Than they were And that is That is why I'm calling this The secularization Of the Lord's Supper Because these people Were bringing in Values And practices That were found Outside of the church In the world It's not enough Is it To be physically Present At the Lord's Supper Is it not the case Would you say That we need to be Spiritually present We shouldn't come Just as individuals But as members Of one another And members Of the body Of Christ You know

I came across This phrase Quite recently And I liked it I don't know If you'll like it I hope you will But Our bodily organs Are all different That word organs That is the word That I like Our bodily organs Are all different That they make up Part of a single body And Believers are all Different No two believers Are the same But they are Brothers and sisters One of another As Colin often Reminds us A family And that that Entire body Whether it's At the local level Or Or a bigger level Than that Is also Indwelt by Jesus Christ And it's

[13 : 44] That kind of Thinking I think For a start That we need To have If we're going To conduct Ourselves In a manner That is worthy Of our saviour Jesus Christ Paul uses Very strong Language He says That the behaviour Of the people At Corinth Amounts to Despising The church Of God And He uses That phrase Doesn't he The church Of God To remind us The church Is not something That we created The church Is not a mere Gathering Of human Beings The church Is unlike Any social Gathering For the reasons That I've just Been stating That we're Members One of another And that we're Members Together In Christ They had

A total Self-regard For their Own Desires Their own Status And their Own Standing And the Humiliated As Paul Puts it Those Those who Have nothing The church Should never Be a place Where people Are feeling Ignored Or isolated Or not Accepted It ought to Be a place Where people Have a strong Sense of Belonging A place Not of Cliques Now we Have to Watch that As well That there Is not Always And only A gravitation To Our in Group Now don't Misunderstand Me I'm not Suggesting that It's not Normal To you know Of course It is That teenagers Young people Young children

Or senior People etc Etc But as long As that Doesn't Morph Into something That is Set You might Say And always Happening All the Time We can Learn from The children They can Learn from Us Younger People They can Learn from Us We can Learn from Them Sometimes it's Hard to Move out Of our Comfort zone But it's Something that We need to Try and Do We need to Be careful Then that we Don't always Mix with our Own preferred Group Be it Young Not so Young Or those Of a Bus Pass So there's The secularization Of the Lord's

Supper But secondly Paul confronts Them with The real Origin Of the Supper In confronting These people With the Solemn And momentous Origin Of the Lord's Supper He brings Into sharp Contrast Does he Not The Travesty Of the Supper That they Are engaging In And I'm Sure he Does it In a Sense In the Hope that It would Lead them To abandoning Their Irreverent And deplorable Behaviour Verses 23 To 26 It Follows On It's Linking What he Has said Before What shall I say To you Shall I Commend You In this No I Will Not For I

Received From the Lord I want You To notice By the Way The word Lord Paul Uses This About Six Times In The Next Three Verses And I Think He's Doing That Deliberately He's Saying Do you Realize Who it Is That you're Despising Not just The church But the Lord of The church Do you Realize That who You're Playing Fast and Loose With And behaving In the Way that You're Behaving For I Received From the Lord What I Also Delivered To you That the Lord Jesus On the Night Which he Was Betrayed I think It's Interesting That Paul Brings That note Of betrayal In here I'm Sure Well

[18 : 47] Maybe That's Too Strong It Wouldn't Surprise Me If he Wants Them To Grasp That Because What They're Doing And Sure In Paul's Eyes Is the Betrayal Of the Lord's Supper And here Paul is Saying you Know It's Very Origin At It's Very Inception Was Betrayal And the Lord Jesus Notice he Gives him His full Title And always Remember That when We come To celebrate The Lord's Supper When we Come To break The bread And drink The wine It's No dead Saviour That we Are remembering It's an Exalted Lord When he Was Betrayed Jesus Took bread

When he Had given Thanks He broke It And said This is My body Which is For you In other words Paul is Saying to Those people Instead of Treating the Lord's Supper As just Part of A normal Meal Joining it Fusing it Into the Meal I want You to Bear in Mind That its Purpose Is Symbolising The body Of our Lord Jesus Christ That body That we Heard about This morning That was Born in Bethlehem That human Body That humanity That incarnation That's the Kind of Direction Paul is Suggesting In which Your mind Should be Going If you Want to Truly Participate

In a Worthy Manner The Lord's Supper And you Know In that In these Two simple Words For you This is My body Which is For you Is the Whole gospel This cup Is the New covenant In my Blood You know A covenant Is something Like loosely An agreement Often Between Two parties But you Know this Covenant That Paul Is telling Them about It's only About one Party It's about The God Of all Grace Notice

How Paul Puts it Quoting The words Of Jesus This cup Is the New This cup Is the New covenant In my Blood All Throughout The history Of Israel In the Old Testament It was Always Pointing Towards This new Covenant That would Come When the Messiah Burst Open And into History For as Often As you Eat this Bread And drink This cup Says Paul You Proclaim The Lord's Death Now I I I I I I I I think That's Fascinating That Not only Is the Lord's Supper About Nourishment About Discernment

About Remembering But the Lord's Supper Is not Only If I Could put This Way About Memorial It's About Mission Now What we Are doing Here is Fantastic Because as The Redeemed Of the Lord We need Encouragement We need Grace We need Inspiration We need Assurance We need Acceptance But I'll Tell you This Just in And of Itself Is not Mission There's a Two letter Word That describes What mission Is Mission Is not Bring Them In

[23 : 50] Mission Is Go Our Lord And Saviour Who We Remember At The Supper Is The One Who Said Here Am I I Will Go I Won't Stay In That Transcendence And Unspeakable Exquisite Fellowship With the Father And the Son For For as Often As You Isn't It Strange It's Actually Fascinating Isn't It Who Would Be Proclaiming A Death But This Death Is The Death Of Death This Death And We Must Bear This In

Mind As Christians The Early Christian Church Viewed Felt And Believed That The Death Of Christ Was An Enormous Victory Not Just His Resurrection Some People Might Think The Victory Began At The Resurrection the victory began when Jesus Christ hung on that cross dying for the sins of the world reconciling the world unto himself Paul wants them to grasp something of that so that they will stop this ridiculous behavior at the Lord's Supper that brings me to my third and final point self-examination

I'm just laughing at myself here because I've actually hardly shared with you any of the notes I have done here now this self-examination it's not about let's ask what it's about and what it isn't about it isn't about trying to examine ourselves to see if we're Christians or to see if we are worthy to take the Lord's the Lord's Supper because the fact that we would go to the Lord's Supper presupposes already that we are Christians

Paul is not I don't think asking anyone to examine themselves around these thoughts I think he's asking people to examine themselves in a way that they prepare themselves to be in the right frame of mind and in the right spirit you know the free church used to have preparatory services a communion in the free church especially in the isles the outer Hebrides in the isle of Lewis where my wife comes from and I've been at those communions where they had all those preparatory services and there's something in it we've got to watch you know that human beings are pretty adept at reeling from one extreme to another now there's a verse here verse 29

I think it is yeah for anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself you see that verse there in the ESV in the AV I'll tell you how it reads for anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body by the way just as an aside some people think that the body in verse 29 is the body of Christians but whether it is or whether it isn't it's a good enough thought and if it's another reference to the body of Jesus Christ it's a brilliant thought well it reads in the AV eats and drinks damnation on himself why am I introducing this to this message because I do believe that it has done untold harm in terms of people fearing to come to the table and the interesting thing is the word judgment is used about four or five times in this passage and for some reason the AV has translated it only there as damnation but it's the same word and it comes from the same group that family group of words that are translated judgment every time in the ESV and in the NIV and in the RSV and the reason why that was so dangerous because language by the way is use isn't it words change language is a living thing it's dynamic and language is something that even within a local community can mean something that doesn't mean maybe in another community and the problem is that when this word was used people in their heads interpreted damnation as eternally lost and Paul himself has never come anywhere near saying anything of that in this passage it's interesting isn't it even when he's talking about this self-examination look at how he phrases it let a person examine himself then and so eat of the bread just to examine yourself to take a little pause take a little time to think wow this is the Holy of Holies this is the inner sanctuary this is where the deed was done to secure my redemption this is where the Christ of God hung on the cross self-examination is important because according to Paul if we're acting in a way at the Lord's table that is unworthy of how we should be acting at the table it can incur guilt and it can incur judgment but notice how Paul puts it in verse 32 but when we are judged by the Lord we're disciplined any judgment is discipline and that we may not be condemned with the world now

[31 : 59] if someone did to say to me if you were pushed what would you say is the greater danger danger in our time is that not making enough solemnity of the Lord's table or too much in a healthy way I mean and I would say that perhaps we must always remember that we should come to the Lord's table with a certain with a certain degree yes of thankfulness yes of rejoicing yes of celebration but also with solemnity and one might almost say a grave appreciation and thankfulness lest I forget Gethsemane Gethsemane lest I forget your love for me lead me to

Calvary may the Lord bless these thoughts for our good and for his glory Amen